

Public Involvement Strategy

For the

Backcountry Management Plan

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve

September 2002

Approved by

Dave Mills
Superintendent, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve

Date

Contributors

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve

Dave Mills
Steve Ulvi
Don Pendergrast
Tom Liebsher
Roger Semler
Eileen Devinney
Debbie Nigro
Fred Andersen
Jobe Chakuchin
Jim Lawler

National Park Service, Alaska Region

Judy Alderson
Heather Todd Rice
Joan Darnell
John Quinley

Other Alaska National Parks

Vickie Snitzler
Mike Tranel
Adrienne Hall
Allison Banks

Members of the Interdisciplinary Team

Superintendent
Management Assistant
Outdoor Recreation Planner
Chief of Resources
Chief of Operations
Cultural Resources
Biologist
Subsistence Manager
Natural Resource Specialist (BRIM)
Wildlife Biologist

Wilderness Coordinator
Environmental Protection Specialist
Environmental Resources Team Leader
Associate Regional Director
Communications

Wrangell-St. Elias NP&P Planner
Denali NP&P Planner
Denali NP&P Planner
Glacier Bay NP&P Planner

Table of Contents

CONTRIBUTORS	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	3
INTRODUCTION	4
THE BACKCOUNTRY MANAGEMENT PLAN	4
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PLANNING.....	5
THE NEED FOR A PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY	5
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TECHNIQUES	6
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT NOTICE OF INTENT	6
NEWSLETTERS	6
PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS	7
ADVISORY GROUP PRESENTATIONS AND UPDATES	7
PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS.....	7
INTERNET	8
A WORD ON A TOTALLY OPEN PLANNING PROCESS	8
MANAGING PUBLIC COMMENTS	8
CONCLUSION.....	9
REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION	10

Introduction

The Backcountry Management Plan

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve came into existence on December 2, 1980 when Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). An excerpt from the enabling legislation states that Gates of the Arctic NP&P shall be managed for the following purposes, among others: "To maintain the wild and undeveloped character of the area Subsistence uses by local residents shall be permitted in the park, where such uses are traditional, in accordance with the provisions of title VIII (USDI, 1986)."

The General Management Plan (1986) for Gate of the Arctic further states: "The importance of maintaining the wild and undeveloped character of the area was reemphasized as Congress further designated over 7 million of the 8 million acres as wilderness and six rivers as wild. . . . Only Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve was established with such strong emphasis on wilderness purposes." Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (Gates of the Arctic NP&P) is both the second largest of our National Parks and the National Park Service Wildernesses.

Alaska Region National Parks were either created or modified by the Alaska National Interest Lands and Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA). Most must rely on General Management Plans (GMPs) created more than 15 years ago to provide guidance for use and management of these extensive areas. However, times have changed and these general management plans no longer reflect current conditions or needs. New, more detailed, backcountry management plans need to be developed to address the growing level and diversity of uses, resource management needs, 2001 NPS wilderness management policies, and emergent demands for future uses not anticipated or addressed in the old general management plans.

Several Alaska Parks are in the process of revising their GMPs and three parks will sequence their planning efforts for effective and efficient use of park and regional personnel. The three parks, Gates of the Arctic, Glacier Bay, and Wrangell-St. Elias will hold joint public scoping meetings in the metropolitan areas of Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau, and Seattle November of 2002. Gates of the Arctic NP&P will continue to have public scoping workshops in its resident zone communities over the winter of 2002-03.

Gates of the Arctic NP&P will address four basic purposes in this GMP amendment.

1. Clearly state the desired future conditions, what the park should be like in the future, paying particular attention to the park and preserve's significance, purpose, and importance in both a national and regional context as a premier wilderness unit.
2. Provide comprehensive management direction and prescriptions for 8.1 million acres of parklands only superficially addressed in the GMP.
3. Develop specific management indicators and standards for a model process to ensure protection of resources and visitor experiences. Develop specific indicators of

- resource condition and visitor experiences and the standards for these to guide resource management protection and visitor experience quality and opportunities.
4. Manage the level of recreational uses so that significant impacts to customary and traditional subsistence activities are minimized.

National Park Service Planning

The Backcountry Management Plan will be developed through an Environmental Impact State (EIS) as an amendment to the existing GMP. It will also be supported by appropriate documentation of compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and Director's Order #2: Park Planning. Public involvement will be a critical element in the development of this plan.

The Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) planning framework, adopted by the National Park Service, will be adapted to the Gates of the Arctic NP&P planning process. The VERP planning framework involves 9 steps:

1. Assemble an Interdisciplinary Project Team.
2. Develop a Public Involvement Strategy.
3. Develop Statements of Park Purpose, Significance, and Primary Interpretive Themes; Identify Planning Constraints.
4. Analyze Park Resources and the Existing Visitor Use.
5. Describe a Potential Range of Visitor Experiences and Resource Conditions.
6. Allocate the Potential Zones to Specific Locations in the Park (Prescriptive Management Zoning).
7. Select Indicators and Specify Standards for Each Zone; Develop a Monitoring Plan.
8. Monitor Resource and Social Indicators.
9. Take Management Action.

This document is the public involvement strategy for this project, step 2 in the above list.

The Need for a Public Involvement Strategy

Public involvement improves the planning process by giving the NPS the opportunity to be responsive to the public's ideas and concerns, to involve the public cooperatively in generating alternatives, and to educate the public about the purpose, need, and scope of the project. The result is better planning and that benefits both the park unit and the various publics that utilize the park. Throughout this planning process Gates of the Arctic NP&P will engage in extensive and multi-faceted public involvement strategies. A good public involvement strategy is the result of the commitment to cooperation, coordination and consultation with the public.

Public Involvement Techniques

Environmental Impact Statement Notice of Intent

To initiate the planning process, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Notice of Intent (NOI) will be published in the *Federal Register* for Gates of the Arctic NP&P, simultaneous with NOIs for similar backcountry plan/EISs for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve and Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve. This ensures that all public involvement is considered in scoping (soliciting public comment) and meets the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Newsletters

An initial joint regional newsletter for the three parks, the Alaska Regional Office and the Alaska Support Office will introduce the project. This will include a letter from the Regional Director, information on the backcountry and backcountry planning, the planning process schedule, opportunities for the public to become involved, and contact information for each park.

Subsequent Gates of the Arctic planning newsletters will update interested individuals and organizations on the project and continue to solicit input. These newsletters will include brief background information for those individuals and organizations that become involved later in the process.

The goals of the newsletters are:

1. Communicate information on the organization of the National Park Service and Gates of the Arctic and the park mission.
2. Identify resource and visitor issues.
3. Ask the questions:
 - a) “How do these issues affect you?”
 - b) “What will happen if we did not plan for the future of Gates of the Arctic?”
 - c) “Is visiting Gates of the Arctic in yours, your children’s, your client’s, and/or your visiting friends and relative’s future?”
4. Acknowledge that:
 - a) Given the National Park Service mission and congressional direction in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve is the responsible organization for addressing the issues.
 - b) The National Park Service sincerely wants input and involvement from the public and that the NPS cares about the effects of its decisions on them.
5. Encourage people to care about the future of Gates of the Arctic and to get involved in the planning process.

Up to date contact list, mail and e-mail, will be maintained in order to send the newsletter to individuals and organizations that wish to be kept informed.

Newsletters will also be made available at the schools and libraries in the surrounding communities, and other places of visitor and community contact (e.g. air services, the Alaska Public Lands Information Centers, the Coldfoot Interagency Visitor Center, and with park commercial operators).

Public Scoping Meetings

Meeting with the public will be an integral part of the planning process. Once the Notice of Intent is published three parks (Gates of the Arctic, Wrangell-St. Elias, and Glacier Bay) will hold joint scoping meetings in Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau, and Seattle in the early winter of 2002. After these urban meetings Gates of the Arctic NP&P will host open house scoping meetings in local communities (Coldfoot/Wiseman, Bettles/Evansville, Anaktuvuk Pass, Allakaket/Alatna, Shungnak, Kobuk, and Ambler) late fall 2002 and winter 2002/2003. These meetings will be open forums to explain the planning process, the public participation opportunities, and to encourage the local residents to identify and define important issues. Information from these public meetings will be used to formulate a full range of alternatives for the plan.

After alternatives have been developed, another set of public meetings will occur to explain the alternatives and to encourage the public to comment.

Advisory Group Presentations and Updates

Gates of the Arctic has for several years met with a variety of interest groups and discussed the many issues of mutual interest involved in backcountry management. Concerns raised by these groups are central to the need to develop this backcountry management plan. The Alaska Lands Act established subsistence advisory groups under the Federal Advisory Committee Act for Gates of the Arctic. The Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) for Gates of the Arctic has served an important advisory role in park management decision-making where subsistence issues are concerned. The SRC meets 2-3 times annually and for several years has engaged in discussions about this backcountry plan and how subsistence concerns would be addressed and protected in the process. In early November 2002 the NPS and SRC will conduct an issue-scoping workshop in addition to those scheduled for the local communities. Members of the commission will be invited to help coordinate and participate in scoping sessions in their home communities. Formal updates on the progress of the plan will be presented at each SRC succeeding meeting.

The three Regional Subsistence Advisory Councils that encompass the park and preserve will receive informal updates on the progress of the backcountry plan from NPS staff and SRC members at each stage of the public process.

Public Consultations and Presentations

The park staff will take the opportunity to meet and consult with individuals as well as interested groups and organizations to present information about the on going planning process and to gather public opinion and input. The appropriate individuals in a wide range of organizations will be contacted early in the process so that they have and

opportunity from the beginning to become involved. Examples of organizations are listed here:

- Regional Native corporations
- Village corporations
- Local community governments
- Tribal groups
- Chambers of Commerce
- Tourism associations
- Conservation groups
- Local service organizations
- Recreation associations
- State and federal agencies
- Groups with specific interests in Gates of the Arctic

Not all groups are known to the Park Service at this time, but will emerge as the scoping process begins. Gates of the Arctic has about fifty commercial service providers and two commercial hunting guides who will be kept abreast of the planning process and encouraged to take an active role in it.

Internet

The newsletters and Interdisciplinary Team meeting notes will be available through the internet on the Gates of the Arctic web page (<http://www.nps.gov/gaar/>), the Denver Service Center planning web page (<http://www.nps.gov/planning/>), and the Alaska Support Office environmental planning web page (<http://www.nps.gov/akso/>). The park computer support personnel will do the preliminary work on these web pages so that these newsletters can be posted when completed.

A Word on a Totally Open Planning Process

In a totally open planning process, the Interdisciplinary Team will:

“... do everything within their power to have the public ‘see’ and understand their work as they do it. They’re not satisfied with trying to explain at some later date what they did and how they arrived at their conclusions. They not only want the public to look over their shoulders, they want that public to watch closely enough so the public actually goes through the same learning process that they – the technical experts – are going through (Bleiker and Bleiker, 2001).”

With the advent of the Internet, this technique is achievable at no great expense.

The various opportunities for involvement will be repeatedly outlined throughout the process during each type of public contact.

Managing Public Comments

Microsoft Access software will be used to manage comments received from the public. The Alaska Support Office will organize a database for the use of several parks to manage the public comments.

The compilation of comments made by the public will be reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Team and incorporated into their decision-making process. “Because of the national interest in parks, [Gates of the Arctic NP&P] . . . managers must consider and balance information received from both local and national publics (USDI, 1977).” The compilation of comments will also be made available to the public.

Comments received by the public will “. . . be viewed as a snapshot of public opinion. It should be remembered that the information received by the planning team only represents the people who responded. Also, public involvement is not a voting process. The results of [the] . . . public involvement effort [will] . . . be used, along with the analysis of other information and data gathered during the planning process, to make rational and defensible planning decisions (USDI, 1977).”

Conclusion

Effective public involvement depends on providing a variety of opportunities for individuals and organizations to easily provide substantive input. This is the goal of the public involvement strategy.

At the outset the NPS will actively solicit various organizations and individuals that it believes have a potential interest in the project and the project’s outcome. The NPS will make multiple efforts to reach out to these stakeholders during the process. With a thorough, open and honest effort to include various stakeholders the NPS will gain public credibility. If some parties choose not to be involved during the process but instead become involved at the end of the process with complaints they will lose credibility with other public groups.

At the time of this writing, the public involvement techniques outlined in this document are considered to be the best options for the Gates of the Arctic NP&P planning process. The actual public involvement techniques that will be used are subject to change due to specific situations and budget constraints.

The Interdisciplinary Team will review the public involvement strategy throughout the process and revise it as needed.

References and other Sources of Information

Bleiker, Hans and Annemarie; *Citizen Participation Techniques*; Institute for Participatory Management and Planning; Monterey, CA.

Tuler, Seth and Thomas Webler; *Public Participation: Relevance and application in the National Park Service*. Park Science (20:1 p24-26).

Force, Jo Ellen and Deborah J Forester; *Public Involvement in National Park Service Land Management Issues*. Pre-publication copy distributed at public involvement workshop, October 1, 2001.

U.S. Department of the Interior; National Park Service; Denver Service Center; *The Visitor Experience and Resource Protection Framework – A Handbook for Planners and Managers*; September 1997.

U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve: General Management Plan, Land Protection Plan, Wilderness Suitability review*; November 1986.